

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

TABLE I
TEN YEAR COUNTS OF LITTLE GREBE POPULATION AND NESTS

Year/Month	Population Size	Year/Month	No. of Nests
1. 1989 July	150+		No count
2. 1990 August	280+		"
3. 1991 August	210+		"
4. 1992 July	180+	1992/September	68
5. 1993 August	250+	1993/September	116
6. 1994 August	330+	1994/September	128
7. 1995	No arrivals		
8. 1996	"		
9. 1997 July	300+	1997/October	108
10. 1998 July	300+	1998/October	126

Senkulam and Sathanur Kulam. The total water spread of the three tanks is 8.2 sq. km with 1.4 sq. km sheltered bush margins. My counts of birds and nests during the last 10 years are given in Table 1.

One pair of little grebe had built their nest in a well 3 m in diameter, close to Olaiyur railway crossing, adjoining the irrigation canal. The water level of the well would rise and fall, depending on the level of the canal water. Though

the floating nest of the grebes was first found accidentally in September 1995, I checked and saw the nests each year. One nesting a year was observed in the southwest monsoon.

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7. IRIS COLORATION IN THE LARGE EGRET *CASMERODIUS ALBUS* AND MEDIAN EGRET *MESOPHOYX INTERMEDIA* (FAMILY ARDEIDAE)

The Simpson Industrial Estate, Sembium, in the northern part of Chennai (Madras), is a well-known heronry in Tamil Nadu, India. Species that breed in the confines of the Estate are the large egret *Casmerodius albus*, median egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*, little egret *Egretta garzetta*, black-crowned night-heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, little cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger* and Indian shag *P. fuscicollis*.

Ali and Ripley (1987) mentioned the coloration of the iris of the median egret as lemon-yellow, and that of the large egret as yellow for race *alba* and bright lemon-yellow for *modesta*. Roberts (1991) stated it as yellow in the median egret, but did not describe the colour of the iris in large egret. Brown *et al.* (1982) described it as ruby for the median (race:

brachyrhyncha) and brilliant red for the large egret (race: *melanorhynchos*).

During 1996-97, about 50 pairs of large egrets bred in Simpson Estate. In the early part of the breeding season in November, the birds sported black bills, flesh coloured tibia, orbital skin ranging from bright yellowish-green through bright bluish-green to dark bluish-green. The colour of the iris was yellow in all the birds. By January 4, 1997, the bills of the birds had started yellowing at the base, the colour of the orbital patch and tibia regressed. During this period, one of the birds of a pair was recorded to have a red iris. However, the iris reverted to yellow again after three weeks.

In mid-February, most of the birds were feeding chicks in various stages of growth.

During this time, five birds started courtship display. Of these, two had a pale red iris. The bills were black, the orbital skin bright green, and the tibia pale flesh coloured. The other three birds had a pale orange iris, the orbital skin and bill coloration was as in the other two, but the tibia was bright flesh coloured. Two of the birds with orange irises paired off and started nesting. It was noted that the pale red or pale orange colour of the iris persisted in bright sunlight and in the shade. In earlier observations of 10-30 breeding median egrets, from 1991 to 1996, the iris under bright or diffused sunlight was light orange to bright red in some of the birds. But when in shade (as when the bird ducks to accept nest material from the mate), the iris reverts back to the normal yellow colour.

Change in iris coloration has been recorded for certain egret species elsewhere. Hancock and

Kushlan (1984) mention a brief ruby-red flush of the iris (from yellow) prior to egg-laying in the large egret in Australia and North Africa. They do not mention iris colour change in the median egret, but report it in the little egret *Egretta garzetta* (turns red during the height of courtship) and the grey heron *Ardea cinerea* (changes from deep yellow to deep orange). My observations on the change in iris colouration in the large and median egrets are interesting, as it has not been reported for the median egret, or for *E. garzetta* or *A. cinerea* in India. The significance of the changes in iris coloration, the colour variations under shade and sunlight, and why they do not appear in all individuals of a colony, is yet to be known.

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8. SIGHTING OF THE BLACK STORK *CICONIA NIGRA* AND LESSER ADJUTANT-STORK *LEPTOPTILOS JAVANICUS* AT NAGARHOLE NATIONAL PARK, KARNATAKA

Nagarhole National Park (NP) (643 sq. km), along with the Bandipur Tiger Reserve (875 sq. km) and Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary (325 sq. km) to the southeast and the Wynaad Wildlife Sanctuary (350 sq. km) to the southwest, form a part of Nilgiri biosphere, the largest protected forest tract in peninsular India. The bird life in this region is impressive, due to a dense forest cover interspersed with innumerable rivulets that feed the Kabini river. The existing bird list has nearly 270 species (Anon 1987), and during my visit to the National Park between January 12-14, 1999, I sighted 97 bird species.

On the last morning of my stay at the

Kabini River Lodge at Karapur village, located about 8 km to the east of Sunkadakatte Forest Rest House, Nagarhole National Park, I decided to take a jeep ride into the Park. After about 15 minutes from the Bisalvadi waterhole, the jeep reached a rivulet amidst a very dense forest tract. While scanning the banks for waders, I observed two large birds, the lesser adjutant-stork *Leptoptilos javanicus* and black stork *Ciconia nigra*. The scarlet red beak and legs of the *C. nigra* were perfectly illuminated by the sun and the white underparts were unmistakable. I observed the birds for a good 15 minutes before returning to the lodge. On mentioning the